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Interviewer: Hello, my name is Alicia Mittleman; I'm a curator at the Estes Park Museum. Today is March 7, 2013 and I'm in the home of Harry Kent. We're going to interview him as part of an oral history project at the Estes Valley Library and the Estes Park Museum. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Alicia Mittelman.]

Interviewer: Today is March 17, 2013, what is your full name?

Harry Kent: Harry Ernest Kent.

Interviewer: When and where were you born?

Harry Kent: Boston, Massachusetts, 1955.

Interviewer: When Harry did you become interested in rock climbing?

Harry Kent: My brother Jeff got me interested in it and I was in sixth grade I think. He came home one day and says, "We've got to try rock climbing." So I was living in Scituate, Massachusetts on the water, and he bought a hemp rope and he said, "We're going to the Quincy Quarries to go climbing." That was just a quarry where they mined rock. So we showed up there, there were a few other climbers and so that was, so I was in sixth grade and we went.

Interviewer: How do you think he had some exposure to rock climbing?

Harry Kent: I think he met somebody at his college maybe or had heard about it and then he probably went into Eastern Mountain Sports in Boston and realized, "Ho, there's a little climbing scene at this place called Quincy Quarries." He said, "We've got to go there."

Interviewer: What was that climbing scene like?

Harry Kent: The quarry is no longer there, there's homes, condos and all that. It was a hole in the ground with sort of cliffs on each side, maybe 40' or 50' high. Some of the rock was decomposed; some was very nice granite with tiny little cracks. The anchors were big trees on top and we had no idea how to make knots or to anchor into anything. So a lot of inexperienced people were there and yet it was sort of, I think people found out about it from Eastern Mountain Sports and the locals, so it grew some. It was pretty tiny, tiny spot.

Interviewer: How then did you have access to equipment, was it at EMS or was there some sharing of gear?

Harry Kent: We bought the rope at the hardware store and I remember, and then we had heard about the Shawangunks. We heard that, "Hey, that's really where the climbing is." We also knew that there was gear called "chocks and hexcentrics," but we had really never seen any because at the Quincy Quarries it was all rope and webbing that we used. We didn't buy any gear but we loaded up my brother's Volkswagen one day and drove to New York to the Shawangunks. Got in the parking lot and we probably had some, I don't know if there was a guidebook or if somebody said, "Hey, just go park here and start climbing." Go to the parking area and we started hiking in to some climb we were going to do and I'll never forget, there was a climber coming down the trail and I could hear the sound of his rack. Of the hexcentrics and the chocks making that sound that is unique only to aluminum wedges. I'll never forget that and I went, "We're climbing, this is the big leagues." And so we were kind of nervous and I don't remember that day climbing, I don't know what we did, where we went, but I think Jeff had a friend that had some gear and it's likely that we met him there and he took us or something.

Interviewer: When were you introduced to the Rocky Mountains?

Harry Kent: Again, my bother Jeff was a huge influence in my life. He hitch-hiked, when he was in high school some time, he hitch-hiked to Colorado and then continued on. He discovered climbing here in Rocky Mountain National Park. He didn't do much climbing but he went, "Oh, this is also the big deal." So he came back and at this time I was in high school and I was ready to do a road trip for a few weeks one summer, I think I was a junior in high school. So I stuck out my thumb and ended up in Rocky Mountain National Park and I looked up and I went "Holy mackerel this is really cool." On that trip, that's where I first met my best friend and still life long climbing partner, Keith Lober. He was working at Outdoor World and I walked in there with my pack and a pair of Royal Robbins climbing shoes hung over my shoulder because I wanted to look like a climber. He's a clerk behind the counter and I say, "Hey, what's the climbing scene here, I want to do some climbing." He's like, "Oh, let's go after work, I know some places to go." We made a deal, so I came back after he got off work and he was even less experienced than I was at the time. We went to the rocks above, it used to be Rock Acres, what's that called now?

05:28

Interviewer: Black Canyon.

Harry Kent: Black Canyon. We went there and bouldered around, put some ropes up and then I think the next day we went to the Thumb and Needle. Had a scary experience there, I was half way up leading and I looked down and all my gear had come out, pretty beginner. It was all sitting right there in his belay plate, so I'm holding on. I said, "What do I do?" He goes, "Just untie, I'll go ahead and climb around to the top of the Thumb and I'll lower you down a figure eight knot and then you can clip in and I'll belay you to the top," and that's what happened.

Interviewer: Wow, and this was when you were a teenager, you're still in high school at this point.

Harry Kent: In high school, I was a junior.

Interviewer: Did you have to go back to Massachusetts?

Harry Kent: I did, yep.

Interviewer: When you were there, were you participating in some of the more traditional sports at your high school too?

Harry Kent: I was, I was into soccer and I was also a wrestler. But there really wasn't much climbing where I grew up. The Quarries by then, I don't know, I think that I had lost interest or maybe just, I mean when I went back I knew I really loved climbing but the Quarries wasn't the place to go. We could have gone to Mt. Washington and all that, but I went back and had to stay in school and finish my high school. As soon as I graduated from high school I worked a little bit on my summer job and then I hitch-hiked back out here. Keith was still here and so we did some more climbing then, that was our first attempt on Longs Peak, that was pretty funny. Then I had to go college, but I didn't start college until January of '74. We climbed a lot in the fall around here and then I went to college. He followed me to college, Keith did. This is a cool story.

Interviewer: Where at?

Harry Kent: Southern California, United States International University [San Diego]. I'm in school right, well actually the day of enrollment when college students arrive to enroll, here comes Keith, hitch-hiked in. They started to think that he was a student. He had full access to the cafeteria without a card, he was living for free. So I would go to class and he'd go climbing during the day, hitch-hike to Mission Gorge, which probably is still there I think. It's a small again, little tiny climbing area. He started climbing, hitch-hiking around and then he'd come back for dinner and he stayed in my dorm. I'd do my classes. That lasted 2 ½ months, by then we both knew we had to go back to Colorado, we just had to climb. I was spending

my mother and father's money and I did good, but I didn't have the passion for school, it was all about climbing. We hitch-hiked back here, lived in a tee-pee for a while on somebody's property, had no money.

Interviewer: Where a bouts was that?

Harry Kent: That was off of Mary's Lake Road, up from Riverside, or up from Broadview, up Mary's Lake Road. All we did was climb. We got jobs; I think my first was at the Mountaineer Restaurant when that was downtown. All we did was wash dishes and get time off to climb. Then I graduated to the Holiday Inn as a dish washer. Same drill, just kept climbing, kept washing dishes. Then I became a breakfast cook, a little more responsibility. We would go off every spring to Yosemite Valley for two months and then I'd come back and got my job back and do some more cooking and keep climbing.

Interviewer: Did Keith continue to work at Outdoor World?

Harry Kent: No, by that time I'm sure he had been fired. He started on a path into medicine actually. Later on we had taken an EMT class together, I'm going to say that was probably in 1980, early '80s. He realized this is probably going to be a good field to him. So he started taking more classes and doing more training in paramedicine. Eventually became a paramedic, traveled all over the country to pretty intense cities to gain his training and then eventually he got a job with the National Park. Worked here as a Longs Peak Ranger for a season and then started moving around at other National Parks.

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Interviewer: To be clear, that year that you left college and moved to Estes Park, what year was that?

Harry Kent: '74.

Interviewer: 1974.

Harry Kent: Spring of '74.

Interviewer: You mentioned you had a funny story about climbing Longs Peak together.

Harry Kent: Yeah, our first time, it was, so that would have been in the spring of '74. So could have been bad weather, it was a pretty mild spring I think that year. We had no clue about gear, food, what to take and all that. So we just stuffed some stuff in some packs, sleeping bags and started hiking up to the Boulder Field. Made it to the Boulder Field and then made it up to the Agnes Vaille Shelter Cabin and we bivouaced in that, why not? Then a storm came in and the next day, I should look

for these photos, we staged a photo of Keith at the base of the North Face, just outside of the shelter cabin, taking one step up with an ice axe on his pack and everything to make it look like we were climbing up. We had no intention of climbing up the North Face, we had a rope and probably two ice axes and that's all, cause we were going to do the Keyhole [Route]. But we wanted people to think we were climbing. It was a miserable night we spent, we were freezing and our water froze. Our boots froze and it was exciting.

Interviewer: Then did you hike up the Keyhole or did you do a technical traverse across the Ridge or Cables Route?

Harry Kent: Nope, we took that photo and packed up and headed back home. [laughter]

Interviewer: But you made you way back to Longs Peak may times since?

Harry Kent: Definitely, yeah.

Interviewer: In addition to climbing with Keith, who were some of your other climbing partners in those earlier years?

Harry Kent: There were several. In the early years there was Joe Lattick, he's now living and working in Alaska. Denis Laird was a local. Scott Kimble, of course. Several others and I guess names slip my memory right now. Doug Snively, of course and Billy Westbay was around then; it was a little later on then. Yeah, there was this kind of very close-knit community of climbers. All we wanted to do was climb. We valued climbing over anything else, we valued it over money, we valued climbing over responsibility. It took most of us, we gave it a lot, it was a passion, still is.

Interviewer: Tell me more about that. Why did it rule your life, climbing?

Harry Kent: Well, it was exciting, it was a lifestyle that we, it was in some ways easy because that's all we had to do was climb. We didn't have to get real jobs; there was no other responsibilities that we had. We just loved climbing so much that that's all we wanted to do. We did, we sort of blew off the rest. I should speak for myself; I just sort of blew off the rest of responsibility and just pursued climbing. Sure, I had a job along the way and I stayed in contact with my parents and all that, but climbing took over. It's a passion; it's just so fun to feel. Being outside and moving your body and touching real nature, touching stone and the feeling, the process of the movement on it. Also the difficulty, I think a tonic [?] struggle was really good, to really go "Whoa, this is hard." I just loved the process of it. I liked the difficulty, I liked the challenge. It was thrilling too, it was thrilling.

Interviewer: Tell me then, when did you transition from climbing and setting your own pursuits in Estes Park and transition to guiding?

Harry Kent: I think I started guiding in the very early '80s; I'm going to say it was 1979, the summer of 1979. Do I have that right? 1977, I believe. I had an apartment with 20 other people over by the hospital and we used to call it "Floyd's Hotel," this apartment. I was the one that was responsible for the rent; it was \$100.00 a month. On any given night there, literally I mean that, there could have been 15 or 20 people on the floor. It had one big living room, a tiny little kitchen and a bath room. I can remember having to go to work in the morning; I had to do the breakfast shift at 6:00 and I'd step over sleeping bags and hear this grunting and groaning. I'd make my way to work. I was in that apartment and I believe it was Dan McClure and Billy Westbay and maybe Jim Bridwell showed up to the apartment and they said, "Hey, do you want to start guiding a little bit for [Michael] Covington?" He owned the concession at the time and the school was Fantasy Ridge School of Alpinism. And I went, "Me, be a guide? Sure, yeah." They said, "Well, there's a class tomorrow and we think you should audit it, we think you should check it out and see if this is something, if you can help." Boy was I nervous, here I was guiding and I mean I think I was a good climber but I had no experience guiding. So I went and that's kind of how I started guiding under their tutelage. And took a few courses, audited a couple of classes and then eventually they cut me loose and I could start taking clients on basic rock classes. Back then we called it "Rock One," "Rock Two," and we could take them on climbs of the Twin Owls too.

Interviewer: Was Michael Covington your instructor?

Harry Kent: No, Mike owned the business and he would take out clients and stuff, but no, Billy Westbay was the first person that I followed on some of these classes, I observed him.

Interviewer: For those courses, once you graduated to the level to take clients out, who were these folks?

Harry Kent: Who were the clients? Oh, they were tourists, some of them just wanted to go repelling, some of them were very interested in rock climbing and actually wanted a guide to show them how to put their hands in the rock. How to make a fist-jam, how to use your feet. So some had pre-knowledge of climbing. Others just wanted to try it to see what it was like.

Interviewer: How long did you guide for the Colorado Mountain School or Fantasy Ridge?

Harry Kent: Fantasy Ridge, right. Really I was guiding for several years and then when Mike Donahue took over the concession, he changed the name to Colorado Mountain School. And then I continued to guide and to help out Mike Donahue at that time. I was guiding part time for Fantasy Ridge, for Mike Covington. He had a lot of guides around and quite a scene. I was sort of low on the totem pole, I wasn't as experienced, I wasn't as good a climber. Back then to have a climbing school, the focus was on you wanted the well-known, really good climbers. Nowadays, particularly with my school, that's not really what I need for guides. I need people who are good with children, and who are safe, and who can present something in a good way. So I was part time for those guys.

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Interviewer: Part time probably allowed you to continue with some of your own climbing goals and pursuits?

Harry Kent: Definitely. The whole point, you've got to understand, is climb as much as you can and work as little as possible to have enough money to support your climbing. That's what we did for many years, not just like a season; it went on and on and on. I can remember thinking that, "You know, I've climbed 300 days this year." I mean lots, just lots of climbing. I continued to have my cooking job, continued to guide part time, and yes, continued to go to Yosemite twice a year, in the fall and in the spring. Then eventually Keith and I discovered the Alps. This coincided with what we had started to do here which was winter climbing. Winter ascents in the National Park. Keith and I, when we would go bouldering, we'd sometimes go bouldering in winter with our crampons on just to train for the Alps. I can remember going, "Hey, let's pretend we're on the Hinterstoisser Traverse, let's pretend we're on the Walker Spur. We would boulder with crampons and ice axes. I'd like to think we took our training seriously; it's nothing like the athletes are doing nowadays for training. We made an attempt to train. We discovered winter climbing and in order to get in shape for the Alps, we had to start climbing in Rocky Mountain National Park. This Park has some of the most beautiful, difficult, challenging, wonderful winter climbs you could possibly imagine. If you are able to handle the weather in Rocky Mountain National Park and actually get up some of these faces in winter, you don't need any other training to climb around the world for that.

Interviewer: What kind of conditions are you facing?

Harry Kent: Winter in the Park, wind, huge. Pretty cold but sometimes you get a phase when it's pretty warm too. I think zero degrees, sometimes colder especially if a front drops some precipitation and then when the front moves on, it gets colder right

after that front passes. This was always a big deal because back then, early on we didn't have bivy tents; we did have fancy protaledges we could set up on climbs. The bivouacs were generally open on some of the faces unless we were down the day before, we could dig a snow cave or something. We didn't have the money frankly to even buy tents back then. I can remember, we didn't have cars,

22:43 [End of Part A.]

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and so a winter ascent was a big deal. We'd hitch-hike into the Park with our packs, so you might get to the trailhead in the morning, you might get to the trail head at 4:00 in the afternoon. Then you'd just, that's the time frame you are on, and then when you are done with the climb you'd ski back out to the trailhead and go well, you're exhausted, you're wet, you're hungry, you're tired, stick out your thumb, somehow get back to town. I can remember when we first bought a car, "So good, we can get there and then we can get back." Sometimes the car never started but it was a big deal.

Interviewer: I've got to ask, are there any memorable moments hitch-hiking in the Park with all of your gear. Rock climbers were not a common sight, especially in the winter. How did people react to seeing you out there?

Harry Kent: It was unusual to see people hitch-hiking in the Park with full on winter gear and packs. I don't have any memorable stories of that. The only memorable story I have is when we finally reached an era where we had a car and we didn't have to go through all that anymore. Going back to the bivouacs, generally they were open. So if a front came through you'd get real wet and you'd get real cold, and then when the front passed, if you were still climbing, it was cold. You had to take all the precautions, sleep with your boots in your sleeping bag and keep moving during the night and stuff. Back then too, for the winter ascents, it was a big deal to do winter ascents which starts December 22nd, that's the winter season technically and it ends March 21st I think, is the end of winter. If you started climbing during the shortest days of the year in December, in January those were long bivouacs. Those were what we used to call the "sixteen hour bivouac," meaning for sixteen hours you are miserable. You'd have eight hours to climb, and also back then the headlamps weren't great. It's not like you just climb through the night, you could ski in the night with a headlamp, but when it really came time to climb you needed daylight. I recall being real miserable on some of these winter ascents we did.

Interviewer: We were just discussing that you and Keith were training hard, making a lot of winter assents in Rocky Mountain National Park, really pushing yourselves hard there. This is in the late 1970s, early '80s. In 1982 you and Keith made the first American winter ascent of the north face of the Eiger in Switzerland. The Eiger is a 13,000' mountain in the Bernese Alps. There is different areas to climb there. The North Wall had a very tragic history of climbers trying and not making it. There were fatalities. How did you two decide to go after this project?

Harry Kent: We had read books for many years before we thought we were ready. The Eiger was always on our radar, as was other climbs in the Alps. But the Eiger was always, "We might do that someday." That's why we climbed so hard around here in winter. We climbed several new routes on the East Face of Taylor in winter. Several new routes on McHenry's, Longs Peak of course, Kiener's and difficult routes on the Lower East Face, Ypsilon, all for the Alps. All for training for the Eiger. We designed some of our own gear back then, like we had Rich Page, who had Buzzard Mountaineering, design a tent for us. So we started kind of steering towards this. Then it was time, we had made a trip to the Alps earlier, a year or two before, not to climb the Eiger, just to climb the big walls over there. We started getting our feet wet and realizing, "Ok, I think we can do this, let's keep an eye on how we're feeling." Then we just threw down our money and bought the ticket and went over there, it must have been February sometime of '82, checked into the youth hostel and started waiting for weather. We would ski to keep active, to keep in shape. We helped out on a movie that the Brits were making on an ascent of the Eiger. They were documenting John Harland's tragic climb on the North Wall. So we met up with some well-known British climbers, helped them do some things with the filming. Then that was done and we made three attempts that were all aborted because of weather and it was getting down to the wire because in order to make the attempts we had to buy a train ticket up Kleine Scheidegg. Every time we went, that was money that we spent, and we're like "We can only afford about one more train ride up here unless we want to start hiking out." Finally on the fourth try the weather was reasonable and we got our start up the wall, left our skis at the base and never got those back. Eight days later we were back down and Kleine Scheidegg. So we were on the wall for six nights and then actually on the wall for six nights and then one night on the way down, so I guess seven days later.

06:14

Interviewer: Did you alternate leads on the climb?

Harry Kent: Yeah. The North Face of the Eiger is 6,000 vertical feet. The summit is about 13,000', so it's over a mile and a half high. We had climbed the classic 1938

route. It was a journey in history for us. Nowadays, I think the Eiger has been climbed in like three hours, I mean it's absurd when you compare what we did to what is being done now. It has a lot of history; every single sort of bivouac on there is named. Like the Swallow's Nest, the Hinterstossier Traverse, and the White Spider. Everything has a name on the Eiger. It's just steeped in history. Taking seven days to climb it, we were able to sleep at every famous bivouac, The Swallow's Nest, The Cave, The Wet Bivy, all of them. We could go, "Wow, we're really here doing this." Even though it was a very stressful climb, it was very scary for us and there really does come a place on the Eiger, particularly in winter, where there's no retreat, and that's ok. So it was the most beautiful experience in the world as well. It was very emotional, I'll never forget, we were on the summit for two nights waiting for the avalanche conditions to improve so we could descend down the West Flank. We started down the day before when we got on top and Keith, a big huge slab kicked off below his feet, and we went back up to the top, set up our bivy tent. By then everything was soaking wet, but we called back in and said, "We can't go down now." Then it cleared, big wind storm came up, took care of a lot of the avalanche danger believe it or not, and then we descended down. I can remember when I knew we were finally out of danger, when we were, there was no more risk of avalanches and we knew we were going to be safe, it was the most emotional experience I think I've ever had in my life around climbing. I just threw my pack down and started weeping and sobbing and I went, I just didn't have any words, all I could do is cry. I can remember telling Keith sometime during that, I said, "Keith I'm crying because we're never going to go through this climb like this ever again together, this is what it is. All the years of training, all of what we committed to it, we may do other climbs; there will never be another Eiger." So it was really emotional. And then we made it back to Kleine Scheidegg, some of the locals through us a little party, they were keeping track of us. There were helicopters during the day; people down in Kleine Scheidegg, the helicopter operators could make a lot of money when there was a team on the wall. So they could get whatever, \$200 or \$300 per passenger to fly by and watch the climbers go up. Not real good for our nerves, particularly some of those pilots would come pretty close and we'd express to them the proper hand signals to go away. But it added to the excitement I think a little bit for us.

09:45

Interviewer: What was to follow when you came back to the United States, and again you two are the first American team to do this winter ascent?

Harry Kent: The first person we called when we were off the wall and safe, I called Steve Komito. I said, "Boss, we pulled it off." He was so happy. He goes, "I'm picking you up at the airport." I said, "Well, that's going to be a couple of weeks, we're

going to Amsterdam, we're going to London." He did pick us up, the ride home from the airport we told him all about it and everything. That's really about it; I think there was a few news articles and that. Keith and I eventually went on a nationwide lecture tour. That has stories; we would charge whatever, \$100 a talk and some talks we would make more, some barely any. We literally had 16 or 17 of these talks lined up all over the United States. Almost every talk we made, we had just enough money from that talk to buy gas and get food to get to the next talk. It was a break even proposition, but it was fun.

Interviewer: I feel that it is important to mention that in this period of time you were also getting into triathlons and endurance races. How did you balance that with rock climbing?

Harry Kent: I think they both sort of, the triathlon and running, biking, balanced out the climbing. I think there are some good cross-training advantages from climbing, skiing, and winter climbing, and biking. I started running with one of my dear friends, Chris Reveley, and we still bike, climb, ski, as hard as we can together, to this day. We just mixed it up, it all complimented each other. We'd dabble in triathlons and did the Iron Man a couple of times and some local things here, they were just fun.

Interviewer: You also won some of these races.

Harry Kent: Some of the local ones and we had a local triathlon here that I was able to come in first, a few times I think.

Interviewer: Isn't that called the Estes Alpine Classic?

Harry Kent: That was, the Estes Alpine Classics. At that time a very well-known climber named Chip Salaun was the race director and a very good climber, very eccentric person, and a good athlete. He was the Race Director; I climbed a little bit with Chip. In fact did an expedition to the Arctic Circle with him in 1976, I believe.

Interviewer: To the Arctic Circle, what did you do there?

Harry Kent: With Chip, we drove his car up the Alaska Highway and parked at a mining town called, in those days Cantung [North West Territories, Canada]. From Cantung we filled up our backpacks and shuttle gear, we were attempting to climb the Lotus Flower Tower. Most normal climbers and expeditions take a helicopter in and are deposited at the base of the climb. Chip wanted to do it without any outside support. That meant hiking in 100 miles each way. Well we made it about 50 miles in and I burned out, it wasn't working out. We weren't getting along very well, nothing major but I went, "Two people out here," and I was unsure if we

were ever actually going to get to the base of the climb. We had over 150 pounds between us, we were shuttling and I thought we would just die of attrition before we'd get there. So I turned around, left Chip, and it was ok. Left him where he needed and he was going to solo in there and do the climb. So I went back out to the mining town and waited for, I think three weeks to a month. I was taken care of though cause I played piano and they needed a piano player to play at the bar in this mining town. So I got food, I got drinks and I did some exploring around the village while I was waiting for Chip to come back. One day I am walking down the road and I see this ghost of a figure kind of staggering with a light pack on. It was Chip and he was very malnourished and had really beat up his body being alone carrying that kind of weight for that long. He ran into some trouble, he fell into a crevasse and it took him I think a couple of days to get out actually. It was a very serious thing. He came very close to dying.

14:58

Interviewer: Three to four weeks sounds like a very long time to me. While you were waiting in town, were you worried about him? What kind of thoughts were going through your mind?

Harry Kent: At some point I did start to wonder, "He might not be coming back." I was starting to come up with a plan. He said, he goes, "Look, give me a month." But I knew, I went, you know I was surprised that he hadn't called it off within three weeks. I was trying to figure out, "Ok, I'm going to have to drive the car back," because we had no radios, or no phones to call anybody or anything. I thought about, "Well, I'll go in and start; I'll mount a little expedition on my own." There was no help around there. The locals are just miners. I had started to entertain what might be coming up here. Never came true.

Interviewer: Good, and the two of you returned to Estes Park?

Harry Kent: Yeah, I think I went via California and he went via somewhere else.

Interviewer: Following all of these incredible assents and trips, you came back to Estes Park and you started formulating a plan for a business called Kent Mountain Adventure Center. Tell me about that.

Harry Kent: When I was working at Colorado Mountain School with Mike Donahue, I started a little youth climbing program. And Mike, we were really committed to the bigger picture of climbing. Both Mike and I really, like yeah, climbing is, we both believed that climbing was really important for people, anybody. Because we got a lot of benefit out of it. I went "Mike, we've got to start climbing with kids." He's like, "Let's do it." So I kind of dabbled in developing this youth program. It

started to grow and I started to become more passionate about it. I was still climbing hard on my own and still guiding and stuff. I went, “This seems to be a good direction for me to go.” So I talked to Mike, I said, “I think I really need to go out on my own here, I need to start my own business and really see what I can do with this.” He said, “By all means.” He was disappointed because we were kind of partners and had this fantasy of doing this together for the rest of lives. It didn’t go that way, that’s ok. I took out a checking account at the First National Bank and started taking kids climbing, started taking kids on back packing trips to Utah and other areas. I did that with my wife at the time, Katie Booker Kent. That was our program, we just started doing that and it grew and expanded and we started needing help. At first it was just her and I doing the trips. Started taking on help. For a while we were in the downstairs of Colorado Mountain School doing our program and then we moved out of there to a shack right below our home here. Then we moved from there to another garage until its present day, which is right here on our property, we have the office and we have the garage where we store the gear, so it’s been a good journey.

Interviewer: The Mountaineering Adventure Center, or “KMAC” for short, opened officially in 1987. From the get-go what were some of your core values or philosophy behind introducing children to the sport of rock climbing?

Harry Kent: Good question. Like I said, I just was aware of the benefits that climbing gave me. I was able; it just helped channel some energy into positive things. It requires concentration, it requires focus and if you don’t do those two things well, the results are very evident immediately. If you lose concentration and fall off a hold or whatever, there it is in front of you. “Oh, I made a mistake, let me go back up and try.” So I wanted to help kids actually, I wanted them to have some of the tools that I thought climbing was giving me to be able to make other decisions in their lives. We really focused, sure on climbing, but we had this sort of thing that we were thinking in our heads that really, this is about helping you in your life. Helping you make decisions that are going to be good ones for really other parts of your life. We were committed into helping the kids more really than we were taking them climbing. That was the point.

20:20

Interviewer: KMAC has been in business now for about 26 years. I’m curious how you were able to offer this program to schools where rock climbing is still maybe a little bit on the fringe. How did you translate those values that can be learned climbing to a school and offer this program to them?

Harry Kent: I've found over the years that having the business is about building relationships with the clients, the customers. It goes further than that, it's about building relationships with teachers and I just really I think got very fortunate to have met some really good teachers early on in the business of Kent Mountain Adventure Center. I became friends with them, we worked together. They'd say, "Hey, I've got ten students that I think I'd like to take rock climbing, can you help us?" I said, "Yeah, we'll do whatever it takes to take your group climbing. We'll do whatever it takes to take your group to Utah." So part of it was I want the business, it was even more though, I just want to be part of what you are trying to give these kids. It's all about relationships, how you keep it going, how you keep the business going. Not being greedy and just realizing this is just what we do. You have to have fun at it, not only the clients but I've got to be able to have fun, and I've got to be able to have free time. We need to be able to, I want to be able to say, "Hey I don't want to work now for a while, I want to go on an expedition, I want to go on a vacation." Relationships became very valuable and still to this day, long lasting friendships.

Interviewer: Now that the business has grown, what do you look for in guides for your own business?

22:43 [End of Part B.]

[C.]

00:00

Harry Kent: The first thing I look for in the guides, or the question I ask myself is, "How well will they work with children?" When I say children, I mean from the ages of middle school, high school. That's our niche. We work with college students, we work with adults. Some of the guides have their own climbing program that they do and I help them out with that. But our niche is mostly teen agers. That's a difficult age or it can be, and so you could be the best climber in the world, but if you don't have the skills, Mike Donahue used to say, "You've got to be able to come down to their level." He was right. It doesn't matter how hard you climb, it's about the relationship. It's about being able to say, "Hey, that's ok if you don't make that climb," or "Hey, you know what, you're hiking slow, no problem, let's take all day to get to there if you want." I think climbing, that's what we like, we think we are going to go climbing but it really starts on the hike, that's really where the process starts. There have been times in my guiding career where I've gotten to the base of a climb and all we've done is sit and talk. Then it's time to go home. We might get a rope out and make a knot or two. That's what a good guide can give a client. Sure there's clients that want, "I want you to get me to the

top of the Diamond.” “No problem, we’ll do that.” Sometimes you’ve got to kind of throw them a curve ball. They think they want that, but they might not.

Interviewer: I’d like to move to a different topic for a moment. You’ve done some route development in the area. I want to know if there are any memorable days out there, either with Scott Kimble in 1976 doing the Crystal Catch on the Lumpy Ridge. Does that spark a memory?

Harry Kent: Nothing too major, the name of course. I really don’t remember that was, I know I did that with Scott but we were doing so many climbs back then and some of them, we would write up and I guess we would submit it to whoever was the “Dean of the Peaks” at that point. I kind of forget now, maybe it was Scott. At some point he was the record keeper. We did a lot of new climbs and I was never one to really, “Ok, we did that climb, and I’ve got to go back and record it and make sure that it’s all there.” That never was really my thing. I enjoyed the climbs and once they were done I kind of let them go. I’ve repeated a lot of them and people ask questions, if I can remember them I’ll give them any data I can. It’s sometimes funny, cause early on in there sometimes somebody would say, “You know, we just did a new route and it goes up and then you traverse left.” I’m going, “I might have done that.” But I don’t know and that’s fine, that’s the way I actually would want it

Interviewer: What is it like the second time around?

Harry Kent: You know how some climbers actually don’t recall actual moves on a climb? I’m like that. In all my years of guiding I could have a client climbing a crack below me and I’m pulling in the rope and they will say, “Harry what did you do here?” And honestly, I’d have to say, “I don’t quite remember.” Maybe that’s not good guiding, however I, maybe it’s just so focused in that move and during that climb, and then once it’s complete it’s gone. A lot of the routes now, when I redo and some of the early first assents that we’ve done, they seem new, they seem so fresh and they seem really nice. I can’t remember any climbs that I have big sort of memories of events around the first assents.

04:36

Interviewer: The Eiger was obviously an emotional and a physical challenge given the conditions. Did you have any other close calls here in Estes Park and in Rocky Mountain National Park specifically?

Harry Kent: I have been real fortunate. Yeah, I have. I remember one time early in my career; I took my brother Ray up above Emerald Lake in winter. We went half way up the slope beneath the Dragon Tail Spires and dug a snow cave half way up. That

night it snowed and then the next day we, all we were doing was bivouacing, that's what we wanted to do is go dig a cave and come down the next day. It snowed and the next morning we got up, put our skis on and a huge avalanche, we set off right below us. As I started to traverse on my skis, it was your classic slab release. It was big, it was dangerous, and it went right below my skis. I just can remember being there going, "Wow, this is scary." Didn't have a lot of knowledge back then, didn't understand the dangers of new snow or avalanches. Not a good place to dig a snow cave in a storm, but we did. No, I've had some experience in guiding where I've had to go help a couple clients. One client of mine who had a heart attack in winter. I wasn't with him, but he went up there on his own and he had a heart attack and somehow somebody found him and then we started a rescue and all of that. Nothing real, the bivouacs I think, even though they're not necessarily life threatening, those are the ones that are like, "Wow, this is going to be miserable."

Interviewer: What brings you back?

Harry Kent: The passion, the excitement, and the discovery. Like how am I going to do during this bivouac? Am I going to lose it emotionally, am I going to freak out? I don't think I ever did but I think climbing is a test. You can actually dial in what questions you wanted to ask you. If you want to take the big test, then go to try to climb Everest solo without much support. I've gained knowledge of how I handle Harry Kent. How do I handle stress, how do I handle difficulty, and also, "Here's a chance to really use my mind." I can try to figure out how to get this traverse to go. I could try to figure out this anchor, I can try to figure out where to bivouac, what time to leave in the morning. There's a challenge in trying to make it all happen. That's exciting to me, that brings me back. "Ok, got a challenge, how are we going to pull it off?"

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your motivation as an athlete and a guide. I'm curious what observations you've made over the course of the last 30 years of the climbing community in Estes Park. How has it changed?

Harry Kent: I think the climbing community in Estes Park has changed a lot from when I was climbing actively every day or as much as we could back in the late 70's. Back then, for one I don't think there were as many climbers. I'm going to say there were a dozen of us living in Estes, maybe a few less. We all climbed together, we just kind of partnered up. It was like this weekend I would climb with Scott, the next weekend it would be Joe, this weekend it would be Keith or whoever. Everybody mixed it up; you didn't have a big pool to draw from. Also we didn't really, there wasn't a lot of money around then, sure some of them had cars but a trip to Boulder was a huge event. That was an expedition, of course I'd have to

hitch hike down there so we didn't go to Boulder all that much. When we did, "Wow, we're in Eldorado, this is cool." Very intimidating cause it was very different than Lumpy Ridge. I can remember back then there was a restaurant called the "Coffee Bar," and that's where we'd kind of group up and meet or we'd meet at Komito's too. We'd go there and drink coffee if the weather was bad. We'd kind of fanaticize and lie to each other about what we'd done and stuff. That's where you'd kind of began to get the plan going about what you're doing this afternoon or tomorrow. The gear is so different now; the climbing gear has made and opened up such new challenging terrain for the climbers of nowadays. That's just great to see the sport growing in those directions. They're climbing stuff now that I just can't fathom myself.

10:14

There was more of a community feeling to the climbing culture when I started here because it was smaller, we were really friends and we weren't just climbing partners, you were also friends. Nowadays sometimes it's like, "Hey, I just want to go climbing" and you just grab a partner. Like you might do at a climbing gym or something. Again, the relationships were deeper, they were more satisfying I think to those people that were interested in going deeper with the relationships. There was more adventure I think back then; obviously there was new routes to be done, so every climb was an adventure if you were doing a new route. Even if you were doing a route that had been done before, it hadn't been done many years before. So there was sort of always adventure. It was always like, "Wow, how are we going to use this gear?" I just required a lot more gear and it required more tinkering around and the climbs took forever back then. Nowadays you like, "Let's go to Lumpy and I think we can do three climbs if we go up to Sundance or the Book." Back then we'd do one climb and it took all day and it was slow and we didn't hang a lot back then either. That was I guess maybe the standard that this local climbing community developed in Estes. We weren't "Hang Dogs," if you couldn't do a climb, you'd down climb and then rappel off, come back the next day. Well that's true, because the climbs nowadays, it's just easy to hang, easy to plug in gear and hang. Back then, just more traditional, if you couldn't get up it you probably wouldn't get up it. You might aid up it but you wouldn't try to free climb it and then hang and shake out and rest and then go back up.

Interviewer: Why was it so taboo to hang on gear?

Harry Kent: It's the game that you can make it. For some reason that I think in Estes we kind of felt like, "You know what, if you gotta hang, you're not a very good climber." I think that's the way they become even a better climber. I think once you hang there's a mental part of the process that short circuited. It is for me. If I can do a

climb and then down climb and rest, go back up, down climb and rest, then if I can't do it I'm going down. Somehow that keeps the continuum of the mental process intact. Once you hang you've broken something.

Interviewer: Are there any last stories or thoughts you'd like to share?

Harry Kent: You asked Steve, "What would you say to somebody who was going to start climbing?" I forgot exactly the question you asked him. My answer to climbing and life in general is, don't hold back. If there's something you want to do, do what it takes to make that dream happen for yourself. If there's an avenue you want to go down, make it happen. If there's a climb that you think, "I don't know, I think I want to, I don't know," try.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time Harry.

Harry Kent: Sure.

13:59 [End of Part C. End of Interview.]

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ABSTRACT: Harry Kent first experienced rock climbing as a 6th grader in his native Massachusetts. When still in high school he first experienced Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park, first climbing with his friend Keith Lober. That early experience led to a lifelong overriding and all-encompassing passion for climbing. Mr. Kent has been an active member of the Estes Park climbing community since his late teens. The interview names many well-known Estes Park climbers and describes his many rock climbing achievements. Harry Kent shares the training, challenge and emotion of his record climb, along with Keith Lober, of the first American winter ascent of the north face of the Eiger in the Alps. Harry describes the personal journey of self-discovery which is at the core of the climbing experience. As a climber he reflects on the emotion of the intimate experience with real nature, touching the stone and moving on those mountain surfaces. Mr. Kent shares his climbing experience as a vehicle for personal growth and development through the successful Kent Mountain Adventure Center in Estes Park; a youth focused rock climbing school founded in 1987.

Note: Added material appears in brackets.

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